PREKSÃ DHYÃNA : PERCEPTION OF BREATHING

ÃCHÃRYA MAHÃPRAJÑA

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PREKṢÃ DHYÃNA : Perception of Breathing

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Preface

In publishing this booklet, it is hoped to bring to the reader in simple language, some of the truths, already known to the ancient philosophies, and now known to modern science.

Age of Tensions

In this age of technology, industrialisation and over- urbanisation, we are constantly subjected to tremendous stresses and tensions. These, in turn, produce psychosomatic diseases like hypertension, insomnia, and various types of heart diseases. In desperation, people take to drinking and dangerous drugs which give temporary relief, but create more serious problems. The remedy does not lie in drugs or fantasy, but in the process of catharsis and development of the inherent powers.

Philosophy teaches us to realize that our existence is functioning in duality, i.e. there is a spiritual self within a physical body. Science is also proving that life's processes for man lie almost wholly within himself and are amenable to control. The control has to be exercised by the power of the spiritual self, and that inherent potency can be developed by knowing how to live properly, which includes eating, drinking and breathing properly as well as thinking properly.

What is Prekṣā Dhyāna ?

Prekṣā dhyāna is the technique of meditation for attitudinal change, behavioural modification and integrated development of personality. It is based on the wisdom of ancient philosophy and has been formulated in terms of modern scientific concepts. We

hope that the synthesis of the ancient wisdom and the modern scientific knowledge would help us in achieving the blissful aim of establishing amity, peace and happiness in the world by eradicating the bestial urges such as cruelty, retaliation and hate.

The different methods of *prekṣā* (i.e. perception) include *śvāsa-prekṣā* (perception of breathing), *śarīra- prekṣā* (perception of body), *caitanya kendra-prekṣā* (perception of psychic centres), etc. All these are methods of ultimate transformation in inner consciousness. Here, there is no need to sermonize for adopting virtues and giving up evils. When one starts practising perception, one experiences himself that he is changing, that anger and fear are pacifying, that greed and deceit are deteriorating, that one is getting transformed into a 'righteous' person.

Our series "Science of Living" includes tracts on various facets of *prekṣā dhyāna.* In the present one, the reader will find an elaborate discussion on *śvāsa-prekṣā* (perception of breathing). It goes without saying that breathing and vital energy (*prāṇa*) are the prime factors of our life, and hence the first step to unlock the latent energies within us would be to develop the *prāṇa* through proper regulation of breathing. The method of *śvāsa-prekṣā* is thus a vital medium for making life energetic, which is very necessary for an aspirant of spiritual development. He aspires to make his mind ever vigilant. The only way to achieve this is to bring about a vital change in the mode of living which ultimately requires a change in the mode of breathing. Without properly regulating the process of breathing, one could hope of little progress in his *sādhanā.*

Benefits of Prekṣā Dhyāna

Prekṣā may appear to mean different things to different people because it contributes to increase physical, nervous as well as spiritual energies.

On physical level, it helps each bodily cell to revitalize itself, and facilitates digestion; it make respiration more efficient and improves circulation and quality of blood.

On mental level, it proves to be an applied method to train the mind to concentrate; it offers a way to treat serious psychosomatic illneses without drugs; it is an efficient tool for ending addiction and other bad habits; it reveals to one the mysteries of the mind by the realization and the real experience of the inner consciousness which includes the subconscious and the unconscious.

On the emotional level, the strengthening of conscious reasoning controls reaction to environmental conditions, situations, and behaviour of others; harmonization of the functioning of nervous and endocrine system results in control and eradication of psychological distortions.

On spiritual level, regulation of blood-chemistry through proper synthesization of neuro-endocrinal secretions, and dispassionate internal vibrations lead one to attain the power to control the mind and to become free from the effects of external forces compelling one to lose equanimity.

No Theological Dogma

Prekṣā dhyāna can be learnt and practised by anybody without distinction of caste, colour, country and creed. There is no communal or theological bias, nor does it insist on any particular theological belief.

Though the process is not very difficult to learn and practise, it is essential to learn the technique through experienced and trained teachers. Normally a ten-day retreat (training camp) is a suitable means to acquire proper training.

Review of Results

During the last ten years, more than 60 training camps have been organised and more than 7000 persons have learnt this technique. Amongst them are scientists, doctors, engineers, professors, teachers, government servants and other intelligentsia, besides the general public. Police Department, Education Depart-

ment and others have taken part in the special courses organised by Tulsi Adhyatma Nidam. More such courses are being planned for different disciplines, professions and work areas. Over and above those who have been trained in these camps, thousands others have practised *prekṣā dhyāna* and have been benefited thereby. While many of them have restored their physical health, hundreds others have been cured of mental tensions, hypertension and other psychosomatic diseases.

For all these, we are grateful to Yugapradhāna Āchārya Shri Tulsi and his successor-designate Yuvacharya Shri Mahaprajna for their constant guidance and efforts in this direction. These two great spiritual saints have truly blessed the entire human race with the boon of *prekṣā dhyāna*, and we are confident that all and sundry will be benefited by learning and practising this universal and easy-to-learn technique of *prekṣā dhyāna*.

Three permanent training centres have been established viz. 1. *Tulsi Adhyatma Nidam* at Jain Vishva Bharti, Ladnun (Rajasthan), 2. *Adhyatma Sadhana Kendra* at Mehrauli, New Delhi, and 3. *Tulsi Sadhna Shikhar* at Rajsamand (Rajasthan).

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Introduction

To Breathe is to live

It is possible to live without food for many days, without water for several days but without air, normally, not more than a few minutes. Thus breathing is the great vital source of energy. It is life. Each and every activity of life is intimately connected with the process of breathing.

'Breathe is life'. This aphorism states that our life is controlled by breath. In the *Prekṣā* system of Meditation it has been taken as a basic principle. We inhale oxygen and convert it into vital energy, by the process of internal respiration. Proper breathing, therefore, can become an important tool for physical as well as mental health and happiness.

Supreme importance of proper breathing cannot be overstressed. Many of the symptoms of poor health are caused by insufficient oxygenation of blood, and slow circulation. Not only are the nerves, glands and vital organs inadequately nourished, but the excretory systems cannot function properly and the bodily waste- products are not removed efficiently. Not only do we breathe badly, but often the purity of the air leaves much to be desired. Consequently, our nervousness and irritability increases and even the slightest physical effort may leave us exhausted. Worst of all, our resistance to diseases is reduced drastically and we develop greater susceptibility to germs and infections. Correct breathing, by ensuring complete ventilation of the lungs, immunizes us against diseases like Tuberculosis.

In a single day we breathe about 23000 times. Depending upon one's posture as well as physical and emotional state, the

average volume of air taken in a single breath is 1/2 to 1 litre. With proper attention, this volume may be increased upto 4 to 5 litres. In other words, careful reorientation of our breathing system can increase at least five-fold our ability to use oxygen and eliminate carbondioxide. However, we can train ourselves to breathe more slowly and more deeply. The rate can be easily reduced by 4 to 5 breaths a minute. Slower rate results in reduction of wear and tear in the entire body, less work for the heart, lower blood-pressure and quieter nerves.

Exhalation

Scientific breathing begins with a slow, calm and complete exhalation. Contraction of the abdominal muscles helps to reduce evacuate the lungs by raising the diaphragm. More complete the evacuation, greater the volume of fresh air to enter the lungs and purer the air in contact with alveolar surfaces. Unless we first breathe out fully, it is impossible to breathe in correctly.

Inhalation

Having emptied the lungs, the next step is to fill them upto the maximum extent. The total volume of air which the lungs are able to contain is known as the vital capacity, which is about 6 litres. Before one can contemplate to increase this capacity, full use must be made of what is already available. Scientific breathing enables the practitioner to do this.

Adequate supply of oxygen is essential for the proper functioning and vitality of the cells. it is therefore vitally important to breathe correctly so that every cell can receive oxygen. The optimum interchange of gases in the lungs occurs when the breathing is deep, complete and slow.

"To breathe is to live" undoubtedly a good adage but to breathe correctly that is slowly, silently and deeply is to live long and keep healthy. Once the technique of complete breathing is learnt, it can be practised anywhere and at any time. In fact, it

could and should become the habit rather than an exercise. Way of complete breathing should become the normal way.

In the following chapters, the reader will find the way of practising complete breathing. Having regulated one's breathing, the practitioner will increase one's operational efficiency by practising perception of breathing because this exercise trains the mind to concentrate and mental concentration is the key to efficiency.

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Breathing : Philosophical Version

Respiration is Spiritual Energy

This aphorism from the Jain Canon *Dasaveāliyaṁ* forms the basic principle of *Prekṣā Dhyāna*. It means : "See you thyself." – Perceive and realize the most subtle aspects of consciousness by your conscious mind. Body and soul, though transcendentally two different existents, are united to form a single entity – a living organism. Breath and life are practically synonymous. To breathe is to live and to live is to breathe. Breath is intimately connected with the body and mind. It is the bridge permitting access to nervous system, mind and vital energy (*prāṇa-śakti*). Breath, body and mind all are energized by the vital energy. Vital energy itself is activated by a subtle body (*taijasa śarīra*). At the ultimate end of this chain is soul or consciousness. And hence perception of the vibrations of breath, body, vital energy and karmic energy is equivalent to cognition of SELF – the conscious energy which animates all other energies including vital energy.

Generation of Vital Energy

What is breath? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the ultimate purpose of breathing. It is obvious that by tackling the root of a problem, one is able to find a practical solution. Once one gets to the root, everything becomes simplified.

Breath is intimately associated with *prāṇa*, which is the kinetic form of *paryāpti*, i.e. the potential vital energy. This is inherent in the basic life-substances formed at the very first moment of conception in the womb[1]. It is well-known that when we breathe in, we inhale oxygen which is essential for life. Oxygen is delivered to each cell of the body to generate vital energy. Thus one needs nourishment supplied by *prāṇa*. To breath is to live and to keep alive one must inhale and assimilate *prāṇa* without break. Inhalation and assimilation are virtually non-stop throughout life. Thus, in the ultimate, breath is the only efficient means of providing *prāṇa* which is essential for generating vital energy. Process of breathing is the powerful medium of generating vital energy. It is continuous and constant. Thus breath is connected to vital energy which is connected to subtle life force which is, in turn, connected with subtle microbody (*karma śarīra*).

Process of Breathing

Fresh air, inhaled in the lungs, contains oxygen (*prāṇavāyu*) which enters the blood-stream and is delivered to the cells in the active tissues. Cells use the oxygen to produce energy. Thus breathing is a source of vital energy. The animation of the entire organism, that is each and every activity of life, needs energy. Functioning of sense-organs, brain, intellect, speech and bodily movements are all powered by energy. Flow of bio-energy is the source of power for all activities. Only the vital bio-energy is capable of animating sense-organs, brain and body which would remain inanimate otherwise.

Controlled and conscious breathing, as in *śvāsa-prekṣā* (perception of breath), is the source of still greater power. Most demonstrations of strength by feats such as driving of a car or a truck over one's chest are nothing but canalized and concentrated bio-energy produced by properly-controlled conscious breathing. The deeper and slower is the breathing, the greater is the production and availability of energy. The soul, the conscious element of the psychic existence, possesses infinite vitality and power. Since

1. See for detailed discussion of *prāna* and *paryāpti*, the booklet no. XI in the present series in Hindi.

breath is the dynamic manifestation of this infinite potential power, conscious breathing can work and demonstrate miraculous feats.

Plants grow actively when they are properly watered, but shrink down if watering is disrupted. Similarly, organs, tissues and cells remain active when supplied with oxygen, and become sluggish and die down in its absence. Moreover, accumulation of carbon-dioxide would also poison the cells. *Prāṇāyāma*–scientific complete breathing–starts with fuller utilization of the vital capacity of the lungs by slow, silent and deep breathing.

Regular practice of *prāṇāyāma* (regulated breathing) is an efficient means of improving the quality of respiration. *Prāṇāyāma* is the scientific way of absorption of oxygen and excretion of carbondioxide. It is the process of reinforcing and disciplining the generation of vital energy – *prāṇa*.[1] Simply stated, it comprises – inhalation, exhalation and pauses (holding the breath). But actually it is much more than the mechanical action. It is, in fact, judicious control and regulation of the process of producing life-giving energy. In other words, *prāṇāyāma* is the result of systematic and scientific control of the process of breathing. Normally we utilize only a fraction of our vital capacity. *Prāṇāyāma* ensures complete evacuation of the lungs by a slow, calm and complete exhalation; maximum intake of fresh air by inhalation and full exchange of gases in the lungs by holding the breath. It also ensures full utilization of vital capacity.

Prāṇāyāma is an efficient thearapeutic force which results in better physical and mental health. It improves blood circulation and cleanses the muscular system. If the intake of oxygen is not adequate, the oxygenation of the blood will not be proper and the poisonous toxins would accumulate. Adequate purification and oxygenation of blood is essential for health.

1. *Prāṇa*–The word *prāṇa* means vital energy. Different scientists and researchers have called it by different names. Mesmer called it animal magnetism. Reichenhach called it odicforce, Blondot callet it N–Rays; Soviet scientists named it Bioplasmic energy and Czec scientists named it psychotronic energy. Russian scientists, Mr. Acnnyon and Mrs. Valentina Kirlian developed a technique of photographing this energy and it can be seen by anyone in photographs and by electron microscopes.

Prāṇa, Prāṇavāyu and *Prāṇāyāma*—the trinity comprising vital energy, oxygen and proper breathing are linked together. Without *Prāṇāyāma*, there will not be adequate intake of oxygen and without proper oxygenation there will not be efficient production of vital energy. *Prāṇāyāma* is the supreme process to fully understand the usefulness of respiratory faculty. Modern science has fully endorsed what was averred by the ancient masters of Yoga philosophy in this regard.

We started with *prāṇa*, took *prāṇavāyu* in our stride and reached *prāṇāyāma*. Now let us reverse the process and begin with *prāṇāyāma*. If practice of complete breathing is regular and scientific, inhalation of oxygen will be proper and adequate. While learning the technique of scientific complete breathing, one automatically comes to know about oxygen and the exchange of gases in the lungs. And when enough oxygen is carried by the bloodstream to the tissues, internal breathing will be active and production of energy will be efficient. Controlled canalisation of vital energy can produce miraculous feats. This is because the vital body is intimately associated with electrical body (*taijasa śarīra*). Thus vital body possesses most wonderful potential which could be brought to action by controlled breathing.

All the centres for generating vital energy are controlled by our brain. Stream of vital energy can flow in two separate directions : one would be an external route and the other an internal one. When the flow is in the external route, it animates our vital organs. Our normal strength is produced in this way and there is nothing extra-ordinary about it. The stream of vitality activates all centres and our normal life is carried on without difficulty. But when we change the direction of the stream of vital energy, that is, allow it to flow by internal route instead of the external one, different and extraordinary powers are generated.

Object of Perception

Our aim is to awaken the supine consciousness and to activate the streams of mental peace. We desire to be acquainted with the deeper levels of consciousness. If we want to reach the subtle levels of consciousness, we should first be fully aware of the gross ones.

One cannot reach the inner gates without opening the outer ones. We have to proceed towards the subtle from the gross. By choosing the process of breathing as a prop for our meditational exercise, we have taken the first step towards the subtle.

In *Prekṣā dhyāna,* therefore, we use the act of breathing as a prop. That is, the act of breathing is to be made the object of our perception.

The act of breathing is a bridge between the internal and the external. Except the breath, there is nothing else which comes out as well as goes in. Of course, there is the mind; but mind itself needs to be propped up; it, obviously, cannot become an object of concentrated perception.

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That is why we have chosen breath to become the object of perception for our technique. Breath is the only tourist which tours the external space as well as the internal one. It is the only light that enlightens the inside as well as the outside. If we desire our mind to stop wandering and to undertake an internal trip, the easiest way is to make it ride the chariot of breath and obtain access to the inside with it. With the commencement of the internal trip, one will become an introvert and a spiritualist. Thus association of the mind with the breath is the easiest way to become spiritual.

The ancient methodology is of controlling the mind and to attach it to the breath. Mind itself becomes controllable and its restlessness vanishes.

Why Breath Is Chosen ?

A question may be raised – why are we preferring breathing to anything else as the object of our perception ? We shall try to

understand the special importance of breathing on the basis of scientifically established facts-Various functions of our internal organs and systems[1] are controlled and regulated in two ways :

(1) voluntarily

(2) autonomically

Contraction and extension of skeletal muscles and movement of limbs are not automatic but are voluntarily controlled. On the other hand, digestion, blood-circulation, heart-beat etc. are autonomically regulated and are not amenable to voluntary control. Respiration is the only function which can be controlled voluntarily as well as autonomically. In other words, it continues whether we are aware of it or not.

Breath : a Pure, Natural and Inherent Medium

When we speak of voluntary control of breath, it means firm association of conscious mind with process of breathing. One becomes aware of each and every breath, when one breathes consciously. This, then, is a technique of steadying the wandering mind and concentrating it. Trained by this process, mind sheds its bluntness and becomes sharp enough to be aware of even more subtle object and phenomenon.

Mind is ever restless. Meditation aims at restraining the mind's wandering and ultimately steadying it. Conventionally this is sought to be achieved by total stoppage of thought. But to stop the flow of thoughts for any length of time is extremely difficult, if not impossible. In fact, any attempt to suppress the mental activity makes the mind more restless than ever. In *Prekṣā* meditation, however, the mind is engaged in concentrated perception of an object or a phenomenon. Here mental functioning is not stopped or suppressed, but regulated and canalised. In other words, the streams of thought flowing in different directions are canalised and mode to flow in one direction. Thus regulated and disciplined,

1. See Human Body, part I for detailed discussion of various body systems.

mind can be made to concentrate in the perception of a single event or a phenomenon for a good length of time. The mind, thus engaged in the function of perception is not available for that of thinking. We have chosen the process of breathing to be the object of perception. As a prop, it is natural and inherent, i.e. not an external or an imported object. It is ever ready to serve as a prop. It is neither memory of the past nor an imagination of the future, but a real event of the present. Perception and awareness of breath enable us to live in the present moment. Besides, it is a pure and uncontaminated event; i.e. bereft of the pollution of like and dislike.

Regulation of Breathing (Dīrgha Śvāsa)

Normally breathing is automatic. That is, it does not need attention. But it is also amenable to voluntary control. If one so desires, one can, even without much practice, change and modify the rate, duration and depth of breathing.

Vital energy is essential for the step by step development of meditational practice. To generate enough energy, abundant oxygen must be supplied, and for this, it is necessary to regulate the rate of breathing. Slow, deep and rhythmic breathing qualifies to become the object of perception.

Breath-rate and Passions

Normally, at rest, our rate of breathing is 15-17 breaths per minute. This rate is under the autonomic control of respiratory centre situated in the medulla oblongata[1] in the brain. The rate increases with the increase in physical activity or excitement and the number per minute goes from 15 to 50 or even more.

The following table gives average rate for different functions.

Function	Rate (No. of breath/minute)
1. Sexual excitement and/or act	60-70

1. See Prekṣā Dhyāna : Human body, part I.

2. Emotional impulses such as anger, fear	40-60
3. Sleep	25-30
4. Speech	20-25
5. Walking	18-20
6. Resting	15-17
7. Normal deep breathing	8-10
8. Deep breathing after some practice	4-6
9. After long and regular practice	1-3

Increase in the rate of breathing makes it shallow, spasmodic and some time gasping. It affects the vital energy adversely and ultimately has injurious effects on health. Many of the symptoms of poor health are caused by improper breathing and insufficient oxygenation of blood. Not only are the nerves, glands and vital organs inadequately nourished, but the excretory system also cannot function properly. Those who breathe badly have to struggle with problems in all directions : health, profession and emotional life. On the other hand, a *sādhaka* will first learn to bring the rate of breathing under voluntary control. He will learn how to breathe properly, scientifically and completely. He will reduce the rate of breathing by making it slow, deep and rhythmic. Consequently, muscles and nerves relax, reducing the load on heart. Simultaneously, urges and impulses, emotions and passions are also subdued and modified. When the breath is shallow and its rate is high, primal drives and passions are aroused, strengthening the urges and emotions. Conversely, when all these are aroused, they quicken the rate of breathing, making it spasmodic and shallow. Quick breathing acts as a transport for all these distortions. One can easily subdue the passions by reducing the breath-rate. If one slows down the breath-rate and commences deep, rhythmic breathing, the emotional forces would at once be retarded. This is because they are deprived of the transport facilities without which they cannot make much headway. A

sādhaka would, in due course, be able to perceive in advance the onslaught of rising passions, and thus will be prepared to nullify their attack by resorting to deep breathing. The rising passions would then subside. Thus, by blunting the sharpness of their attack, a *sādhaka* saves himself from being the victim of the dreadful urges and emotions.

The first step in this process is to regulate the rate of breathing by reducing the number of breaths per minute. Again, one must be quite clear about the importance of the practice of deep breathing. It is not a mere breathing exercise, but much more than that. As a breathing exercise, it does improve the physical well-being. Improvement of physical health or treatment (and prevention) of serious illnesses, though valuable contribution, is not the only or even the chief objective of meditational practice. *Dīrgha śvāsa prekṣā* is the apparatus for regulating and controlling the bestial instincts, urges and passions. Acquisition of physical and mental well-being is a secondary benefit.

Even causal practice can bring down the rate of breathing from 15-17 to 8-10 per minute. Regular practice can further reduce the rate to 6, 4 or even 2 or 1 b.p.m. One can learn to remain for a long time apparently without breathing.

Breath is very precious and one must not undervalue it as a petty thing. If one becomes competent to control this valuable phenomenon, one will reach greater heights in due course.

In the field of spiritual pursuit, breath serves as the foundation on which the superstructure of *sādhanā* can be built. Unless the foundation is strong, the super-structure cannot be stable.

2

Breathing : Scientific Version

To appreciate significance of total breathing, it is essential to understand the special importance of breathing on the basis of scientifically established facts.

Respiration

The body needs a continual supply of oxygen. One may survive for a long time without food, for less than a week without water but one would not last more than a few minutes without oxygen. In addition, for a continual supply of oxygen, the body also needs some means of disposing of the waste carbon dioxide produced by the function of the body cells. Breathing or respiration provides a continual replenishment of the oxygen in the lungs, drawing in fresh air and expelling waste gases.

Organs of the System

The respiratory system includes passageways and tubes through which the air passes : the *nose, trachea, bronchi* and *bronchioles* arranged in a sequence that branches and rebranches and looks like an inverted tree, the tubes and tiny air sacs called *alveoli* in which the exchange of the gases takes place. The bronchioles and alveoli constitute the *lungs*. The system includes a bellow's arrangement – the rib cage operated by muscles and controlled by nerves.

The nose is the gateway to the respiratory tract. It filters, warms and moistens the incoming air. The interior of the nasal cavity is lined with mucous membranes. Dust and other fine particles and bacteria are caught in the stickly mucous. The mucous membranes also help to moisten the incoming air.

The trachea or wind-pipe lies in front of the aesophagus. it divides into two bronchi, one leading into each lung. The trachea with its two branches – the *bronchi* and their numerous branches the *bronchial tubes* and *bronchioles*, looks very much like an inverted tree. Each tiny bronchiole terminates in a cluster of minute air sacs, the alveoli which look like a miniature bunch of grapes.

Human lungs contain about three hundred million[1] alveoli covering a total surface area of more than 90 square metres, enough to carpet a tennis court. This enormous surface area provides for an efficient exchange of gases. The two lungs are cone-shaped with the base resting on the diaphragm and the apex into the root of the neck. They are freely movable except at the roots. Their internal structure is a mass of branching tubes and air sacs. The alveoli has an extremely thin wall and is surrounded by a network of equally thin-walled capillaries. Gases diffuse back and forth between the alveoli and capillaries network, and the actual exchange of oxygen and carbondioxide occurs here.

Breathing

Respiration is the physical act of breathing in which air is alternately drawn into the lungs and expelled from them. Mostly this is an unconscious act that goes on throughout the day and even when one is asleep. Breathing includes two phases : inspiration or breathing in and expiration or breathing out.

When the pressure inside is greater than the pressure of the atmosphere, air is expelled from the lungs. When the outside pressure is greater than the inside, the air flows in. The mechanical power, required for the process of breathing is supplied by the

1. The estimate of the mumber of alveoli in an adult human body varies between 250 millions and 600 millions and surface area 70 to 90 square metres.

action of three sets of muscles – (1) diaphragm, (2) intercostal muscles and (3) clavicular muscles.

The important mechanism for increasing the volume of the chest cavity is the contraction of the diaphragm. This sheet-like muscle separates the chest from the abdomen. It forms the floor of the chest cavity. It has a dome shape when it is relaxed. When it contracts, it flattens out and descends expanding the chest. The circumference of the chest cavity is increased by another mechanism, the contraction of the intercostal muscles which makes the ribs swing upward and outward expanding the chest cavity. The expansion of the chest cavity automatically inflates the lungs. The third mechanism for breathing is operated by the collar bone. Diaphragmatic breathing is slow and deep; costal breathing is rapid and shallow. The maximum amount of air that the lungs can hold is about 6 litres. In a forceful expiration one can expel about 5 litres in one blow. In normal quiet breathing, the volume of air that flows into and out of the lungs with each breath is about $\frac{1}{2}$ litre. The volumes and capacities can be modified by breathing exercises and by practising scientific total breathing[1].

Gas Exchange

The air we breathe into our lungs contains about 21% oxygen and about 79% Nitrogen. The air we breathe out contains 15% oxygen and 5% carbondioxide and 79% nitrogen. An exchange of the two gases occurs in the lungs. Oxygen passes out through the thin walls of the alveoli and in through those of the capillaries that surround them. At the same time there is a net movement of carbon-dioxide in the opposite direction. Transporting facility is provided by the haemoglobin in the red blood cells.

The gas exchange between the blood and tissues is very similar to that in the lungs except that the gases go in the opposite direction. Carbondioxide from the tissues goes into the blood and oxygen from the blood into the tissue fluid and from there into the cells.

1. This aspect of breathing is fully dealt with in Human Body. Part2.

Control of Respiration

Normally breathing is an unconscious act. It can also be controlled (consciously) voluntarily to some extent. One can breathe rapidly or slowly, deeply or shallowly at will. One can even stop breathing entirely for a time. But most of the time respiration is under automatic control by special centres in the central nervous system. The average adult at rest and not emotionally excited, breathes about 15 to 20 times a minute. Emotional stimulation, pain, temperature, carbondioxide level and age cause variations from this basic level. However, we can train ourselves to breathe more slowly and more deeply, though without pause between inspiration and expiration. The rate can be easily reduced by 4 to 5 breaths a minute, i.e. 25% to 33%. Slower rate results in reduction of wear and tear in the entire body, less work for the heart, lower blood pressure and quieter nerves.

Scientific Complete Breathing

The difference between bad breathing and scientifically complete breathing lies mostly in the method and its practice. Because one is perpetually under stress and tension, breathing is usually incomplete, hasty, superficial and sometimes even gasping. Logically, therefore, proper breathing depends firstly on removal of tension. Hard (tense) abdominal muscles encumber every breath. Immobilised diaphragm and inflexible rib-cage hinder the entry of air into the lungs more efficiently than a tight belt or a corset. First step, therefore, is to remove the internal girdle by relaxing these muscles.

Exhalation : Scientific breathing begins with a slow, calm and complete exhalation. Contraction of the abdominal muscles helps to evacuate the lungs by raising the diaphragm. More complete the evacuation, greater the volume of fresh air to enter the lungs and purer the air in contact with alveolar surfaces. Unless we first breathe out fully, it is impossible to breathe in correctly.

Inhalation : Having emptied the lungs, the next step is to fill it up to the maximum extent, the total volume of air which the lungs are able to contain is known as the vital capacity, which is

about 6 litres. Before one can contemplate to increase this capacity, full use must be made of what is already available.

Benefits of Complete breathing

Adequate supply of oxygen is essential for the proper functioning and vitality of the cells. It is therefore vitally important to breathe correctly so that every cell can receive oxygen. The optimum interchange of gases in the lungs occurs when the breathing is deep, complete and slow. According to physiologists, it is necessary for the breathed-in air to remain in the alveoli for 10 to 20 seconds in order to achieve maximum interchange of oxygen and carbondioxide.

Apart from this basic necessity, it is also essential that the lungs themselves are properly ventilated by proper breathing. The dark, warm, humid and badly ventilated lungs are an ideal breeding ground for minute but dangerous germs.

An important correlation between correct breathing and circulation is the so-called suction effect. Deep, slow breathing enables the lungs to literally suck up the excess blood accumulated in organs like liver. Proper rhythmic motions of the diaphragm and rib-cage have the effect of improving the veinous circulation throughout the organism. Thus the proper interaction of the two driving forces of heart and lungs can optimise circulation of blood.

Finally, every organic or functional disorder is amenable to the influence, if not always the cure, of controlled and conscious breathing. Even when it is not enough to cure infectious disease, it supports the struggle which rids us of them and provides the body with ways of avoiding them.

"To breathe is to live", is undoubtedly a good adage but to breathe correctly that is slowly, silently and deeply is to live long and keep healthy.

Once the technique of complete breathing is learnt, it can be practised anywhere and at any time. In fact it could and should become the habit rather than an exercise.

3

Perception of Breathing Types

The process of breathing is the medium of manifesting the consciousness in the body. When the mind is restless, breath is quick, fragmental and shallow. Steadiness of mind makes the breath slow, deep and continuous. Thus there is an inherent unity and mutual interaction between the mind and the breath.

For perception of breathing, the breath is controlled and regulated; it is made to become slow, deep and rhythmic.

Perception of breathing means that the mind is fully engaged in perceiving the breath. It becomes aware of each inhalation and exhalation. Not a single breath escapes the awareness of the mind i.e. every breath is consciously taken and the mind is coupled with breath.

We shall discuss two techniques of *śvāsa-prekṣā :*

(1) *Dīrgha-śvāsa-prekṣā* i.e. perception of slow and deep breathing, and

(2) *Samavṛtti-śvāsa-prekṣā* i.e. perception of breathing through alternate nostrils.

Perception of Deep Breathing (Dīrgha Śvāsa Prekṣā)

As stated before, in deep breathing, upward and downward movement of the diaphragm results in the contraction and relaxation of the abdominal wall-muscles. The action of the abdominal

muscles is a real event of the present which can become the object of perception.

The term *dhyāna* (meditation) is usually defined as the concentration of thought on single particular subject for a length of time. The mind is not only an instrument of thinking but that of perception as well. When linked with *prekṣā* (perception), *dhyāna* (meditation) means concentration of perception and not of thought.

'संपिक्खए अप्पगमप्पएणं'–*Sampikkhae appagamappaeṇam*, 'Perceive the self through the self' is the basic principle of realizing the deeper levels of consciousness. In practice, we use this principle by concentrated perception of the physical self, and, therefore, we commence its perception by "perception of breathing". In the next step, we shall perceive the internal functions of the body and the vibrations generated by the flow of the vital energy inside the body. Constant practice of perception of breathing sharpens the mind and makes it possible to perceive more subtle functions of the body.

Mental activity is twofold–conceptual thinking and perception. These two functions of mind cannot work simultaneously. The mind engaged in the concentrated perception of an event is not available to the function of thinking. *Preksā*–concentrated perception–is, therefore, a practical way and powerful instrument for inhibiting the restlessness of mind by freeing it from the burden of memory, thought and imagination. Perception of breath will not only steady the mind but also halt the train of thought.

Dīrgha-śvāsa-prekṣā is thus a technique in which total concentration is on the pulsating abdominal muscles. Breathing is slow, deep, continuous and rhythmic. It reduces tensions also. An alternative technique is to be aware of the breath by its contact at the junction of the nostrils. Nostrils are the gate-ways for inhalation as well as exhalation. By focusing the attention on their junction, one can be conscious of each and every phase of the breathing process–the respiratory tract, its rate, depth etc. Nor-

mally inhalation of cool outside air would produce a sensation of coolness, and exhalation of warm air a sensation of warmth inside the nostrils. The entire function is a real event of the present. Awareness of the various phases of the breath can keep the mind engaged in its perception and, therefore, bereft of thought.

2. Perception of Breath through Alternate Nostrils (Perception of B.A.N.)

While in perception of deep breathing, the emphasis is on regulating the rate of breathing. In the perception of b.a.n., it is on the regulation of the direction of breath – inhalation from right nostril, exhalation from the left, then inhalation from the left and exhalation from the right. This alternation should be effected by will-power. The mind is firmly attached to the breath and is fully aware of each and every phase of the breath. Such union of conscious mind with breathing through alternate nostrils for a length of time, becomes "perception of b.a.n."

The practice of b.a.n. and its perception results in a better balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic divisions of the autonomic nervous system. It assists in developing the acuteness of perception. In the long run the practice has the potentialities of developing extra-sensory perception and para-psychological capabilities.

Incidentally, this technique is a practical example of coexistence of two conflicting (opposing) factors. We know that functions of sympathetic and parasympathetic divisions are opposed to each other, but each one of them is essential for the proper regulation of the body functions. Perception of deep breathing and of b.a.n. – both emphasize on the rhythmic regulation of breathing. The rhythm can be further controlled and regulated by holding the breath for a specific time, both outside and inside i.e. after exhalation and after inhalation respectively. But in this technique of holding the breath, the pause between inhalation and exhalation should not be long as to cause any discomfort. The pause can be lengthened by practice, but at any time it should be easy and effortless, and not causing discomfort or pain.

4

Perception of Breathing : Technique

Complete Breathing

Mention has already been made of 3 sets of muscles, surrounding the lungs, which take part in the breathing process. They are :

1. Intercostal muscles, which are attached to the upper and lower margins of the ribs and which move the rib-cage upwards and outwards on contraction and in the opposite direction on relaxation.

2. Diaphragm, which is the most important muscle that lies at the bottom of the chest and roofs of the abdominal cavity. When contracted, it descends pressing down the abdominal organs and lengthening the chest cavity.

3. Clavicle muscles, which are operated by raising the collar bone. In this way the upper part of the lungs receives fresh air.

Complete inspiration incorporates the use of all the three sets of muscles in one single, full and rhythmic action. The air should enter in a continuous flow without gasping.

Complete Breathing Technique

An excellent way to learn the technique is lying down flat on a hard surface – preferably on the floor using a mat or a rug. Keep

your arms parallel to the body and the legs straight but not stiff. To concentrate the mind entirely upon the action of breathing is of the utmost importance. It is a good idea to close the eyes to help increase concentration.

Phases of Action

1. Evacuate the lungs with a slow and silent exhalation. Pull in the stomach to contract the abdominal muscles. This action will raise the diaphragm high up in the chest cavity like a piston in cylinder, reducing chest volume and thereby getting rid of the greatest possible amount of air. With the lungs empty, hold the breath just for a second or so before the inhalation commences.

2. Slowly lower the diaphragm allowing air to enter the lungs. Relax the stomach and allow it to expand and rise. This action flattens the diaphragm and the lungs gradually fill with air from the bottom. The abdominal muscles should remain relaxed throughout the inhalation which should be slow, easy and silent[1]

3. Expand the ribs without straining by contracting the inter-costal muscles. This action leads to the inflation of the central portion of lungs, by the entry of a fairly large volume of air though not as large as in the previous phase.

4. While air is being inhaled, complete the filling of lungs by raising the collar towards the chin, without, however, raising the shoulders. The action permits the entry of the air in the uppermost portion of the lungs. This phase is useful only when it is preceded by the other two phases of inhalation given above since only a small quantity of air enters the lungs.

With the last phase of operation the lungs are completely filled with air. The total action should not produce any discomfort or fatigue. Practise complete breathing as consciously as possible. Gradually, habit of complete respiration can be acquired and the quality of breathing will constantly improve. Remember that both inhalation and exhalation must be silent, slow, continuous and easy.

1. Respiration has acquired correct slowness if it is inaudible. If audible, inhaling is being done hastily.

Perception (of Breathing) Technique

Preparation

1. Posture : for a successful practice of meditation, steadiness of the body is essential. Posture, therefore, is an important feature of the exercise. The practitioner must remain motionless, quiet, and alert for the duration of the exercise. Obviously, therefore, a posture which produces any kind of distracting discomfort is ruled out. Strain or discomfort must be avoided during the session. An advanced practitioner may adopt a standing posture. In exceptional condition a recumbent posture may also be used. But a sitting posture is most convenient for learners and novices, and is most commonly adopted. Any of the following postures may be chosen :–

Full lotus posture *(Padmāsana)*

Half lotus posture *(Ardha-padmāsana)*

Simple posture *(Sukhāsana)*

Diamond posture *(Vajrāsana)*

Although the full lotus posture is the best, the *sādhaka* may adopt any one of these which can be comfortably maintained for the duration of the session. Some discomfort is inevitable, in the beginning, in any cross-legged posture, but a little practice would eliminate it to the extent that it ceases to be a distraction. However, if at any time during the practice, there is a feeling of distracting discomfort, the position of the legs may be quietly changed without opening the eyes. In all postures, the trunk and head are erect with the spine and neck in a straight line. There should, however, be no stiffness. Eyes remain softly closed.

2. *Mudrā* :–The position of practitioner's hands is called *mudrā*. One of the following two *mudrās* may be assumed :

(a) Let the back of your right hand rest on your right knee and the left hand on the left knee, both palms turned up. Let the index fingers touch the roots of thumbs,

with a slight pressure in the contact. The other fingers are kept straight.

(b) Bend both arms at the elbows. Keep the back of your left hand on the central part of your lap and the back of your right hand on the top of the upturned palm of your left hand.

General Instructions

Do not put your hands on the ground.

Do not keep your palm turned downwards.

In a standing posture, stand erect with the spine and neck in a straight line but without stiffness.

Keep your feet parallel to each other with a distance of about 10 cms. between them.

Let your arms hang down loosely from the shoulder-joints close to your body, with the palms open, facing inwards and fingers straight and pointing down. Keep all skeletal muscles relaxed.

If a practitioner is unable to adopt standing or a sitting-on-the-floor posture, he may sit in a chair. An armless chair is to be used. Keep your back and neck in a straight line without the back rest. There should be no stiffness.

Keep your feet parallel as in the standing posture. Assume one of the two ***mudrās*** given above.

If a recumbent posture becomes absolutely necessary, one may lie down on his back, keeping a distance of about a foot between both feet, hands about six inches away from the trunk, palms turned upward and eyes softly closed.

Recitation of *Arhaṁ*

Arhaṁ is a Sanskrit syllable (*mantra*). It has unique sound and its loud repetition has many beneficial effects, not only on the physical level but also on psychological and spiritual levels.

Exercise

Remaining in the posture as described before and with eyes softly closed, exhale fully. Then inhale deeply and quietly for about 4 to 5 seconds. Begin the intonation in a firm and controlled manner.

Concentrating your attention on the navel, exhale slowly, producing the sound '*a*' for about 2 seconds. Next produce he sound '*rha*' while concentrating on *Ānanda kendra* near the heart for about 4 seconds. And lastly, taking your mind upwards through the throat to the cranium press your lips softly together and produce without interruption, the sound, *m,m,m,*.....resonating it like the buzzing of a bee. This should last for about 6 seconds.

You shall experience the vibrations produced by the entire intonation first in the abdomen, then in the chest and finally in the cranium. .At the end of the recitation, the lungs are fully emptied.

Inhale deeply again and repeat the performance nine times.

Throughout the performance visualize that the sound-waves weave together to form an impreganable web of armour all around you. This armour will repel the evil effects of malevolent vibrations from outside during the entire meditation session.

Alternate Exercise : Recitation of *Mahāprāṇa Dhvani*

Inhale deeply and silently for about four to five seconds, concentrating your attention on the cranium, and pressing your lips softly together, exhale slowly and without interruption, produce the sound *m,m,m,*.....resonating it like the buzzing of a bee. This may last for about 8 to 10 seconds. Inhale deeply again and repeat the performance nine times.

First Step of *Prekṣā* Meditation

Relaxation (*Kāyotsarga*)

For a successful session of meditational practice, it is necessary to relax the whole body and eliminate muscular tension. Relaxation and meditation are not identical, but the latter cannot be performed properly unless the body becomes motionless. As long as the body is tense and the muscles contracted, the free flow of energy (*prāṇa*) is inhibited and mental steadiness and concentration is not possible. *Kāyotsarga* is thus an essential precondition of meditational practice.

Kāyotsarga is not only total relaxation of the body but also a real experience of self-awareness.

Exercise

1. After completing the recitation of ***ARHAṂ***, maintain the posture, keeping the spine and neck straight but without stiffness and eyes closed softly. Relax all the muscles of your body and let it become limp.

2. Concentrate your mind on each part of the body, one by one. Allow each part to relax by the process of auto-suggestion and feel that it has become relaxed.

3. Starting with the big toe of the right foot, allow your mind to spread throughout the toe; suggest to the muscles and nerves to relax; experience the resulting relaxation and pass on to the other parts of the right leg – toes, sole, heel, ankle, upper part of the foot, calf muscles, knee, thigh and buttocks. In the same way, relax the left limb upto the hip-joint.

4. Next, relax the trunk from hip-joint to the neck; starting with the back and front of the lower abdomen and the upper abdomen going up to the ribs – front and back, the chest muscles, collar bone upto the neck muscles. Then relax both limbs from palms to the shoulders i.e. right hand – thumb, fingers, palm, wrist,

lower arm, elbow, upper arm and shoulder; left limb – thumb and fingers to shoulders.

5. Finally, relax the head from neck to scalp – throat, chin, jaws, lips, tongue, mouth, cheeks and all the other facial muscles, nose, eyes, ears, temples, forehead and scalp.

6. Experience that the whole body is completely relaxed. Retain the relaxed condition throughout the meditational session.

Second Step of *Prekṣā* Meditation

Internal Trip (*Antaryātrā*)

Internal trip (*antaryātrā*) follows *kāyotsarga*. This exercise promotes better generation of the nervous energy which is necessary for the subsequent meditational practice. It directs the flow of your spiritual energy in an upward direction, thereby weakening the force of psychological distortions such as cruelty and fear.

Exercise :

Maintain the posture and the relaxed condition of the body achieved by *Kāyotsarga*. Focus your full attention on the bottom of the spine called *śakti kendra*. Direct it to travel upwards along the spinal cord to the top of the head – *jñāna kendra*, confining it to remain within it. When you reach the top, direct it to move downwards taking the same path until you reach *śakti kendra* again. Repeat the exercise for about five to seven minutes. Concentrate your entire consciousness on the path of the trip – spinal cord, and do not permit it to be diverted.

Carefully perceive the sensations therein caused by the subtle vibration of the flow of the vital energy – *prāṇa*.

After some practice of this exercise, the rate of the ascending and descending conscious attention is to be synchronised with the rate of respiration. When the conscious attention begins to ascend, start exhaling, synchronising the rate of ascent with that of exhalation, so that the top of the head is reached simultaneous-

ly with the completion of exhalation. Similarly, the inhalation should be started with the downward trip of the conscious attention, and should be complete when it reaches the *śakti kendra.* Maintain the synchronisation.

Third Step of *Prekṣā* Meditation

(1) Perception of Breath

A. Deep Breathing

Breath is the source of vital energy—source of life. An efficient and easy way to control mental activity is perception of properly regulated breath. Breathing must be regulated to be deep, slow, calm and rhythmic. Complete exhalation and slow inhalation by the use of diaphragm is called *dīrgha śvāsa.* (i.e. deep or diaphragmatic breathing).

It is achieved by contracting and expanding the abdominal muscles. At the same time, the rate of breathing is reduced. Normal rate of breathing is 15/17 per minute. By conscious regulation it can be easily reduced to 10/12 per minute, and by further practice to 4/6 per minute.

The essence of this meditational technique is the total awareness of breath.

Exercise :

1. Direct full attention to your breathing, excluding all thoughts and sensations. Regulate your breathing: Make it slow, deep and rhythmic. Focus your consciousness on the navel and become fully aware of the contraction and expansion of the abdomen accompanying exhalation and inhalation respectively.

2. Continue the perception of navel region for about five minutes and experience that the breath has been regulated to a slow rhythm.

3. Continuing the slow, deep and rhythmic breath, shift your attention from the navel and focus it inside the nostrils, at the junction where the two nostrils meet. Let the perception of breathing fill your entire mind. Be fully aware of each and every breath. Fix your consciousness totally on the process of respiration so that each and every inhalation and exhalation is perceived.

4. Do not permit yourself to be distracted, but if distraction does occur, return your attention to the breath. If the distraction is due to a thought, do not try to dismiss it, but observe it patiently and calmly untii it goes away.

5. If the distraction is frequent, hold your breath for a while without causing discomfort.

6. Maintain the continuity of awareness throughout the session.

B. Perception of Alternate Breathing

Throughout our daily experience we encounter manifestation and co-existence of two opposing principles such as unity and multiplicity, creation and destruction, positive and negative, hot and cold. Normally the opposing forces are in equilibrium. In our body also there is normally an equilibrium between the two opposite components of the autonomic nervous system – sympathetic and parasympathetic. For optimum health conditions (called homeotasis), a balanced equilibrium must be maintained.

For a practitioner of meditation, the technique of alternate breathing and its perception is not only a valuable means of maintaining homeostasis, but also an instrument of steadying and controlling the wandering mind.

The exercise is similar to the perception of deep breathing, but is more effective in developing concentration. As in the previous exercise total awareness of the rhythm of breathing is essential.

In this exercise, the alternation of the nostril is done initially with the use of the fingers and subsequently by the exercise of will power.

Exercise :

1. Place your right thumb against your right nostril and your ring finger against your left. Let your middle and index fingers touch your forehead lightly.

2. Decide upon a suitable rhythm of exhalation and inhalation (say 6 and 4 seconds) and maintain it throughout the exercise.

3. Close ;your right nostril with your thumb, inhale slowly and silently through your left nostril for 4 seconds. At the end of the inhalation, close the left nostril, release your right nostril and exhale slowly through it for 6 seconds.

4. At the end of the exhalation and without pausing begin to inhale through the right nostril (the same one which was used for exhalation). Inhale slowly for 4 seconds.

5. Now close the right nostril and release the left one and exhale slowly through the left nosril for 6 seconds. Complete the exhalation. This completes the first round, as the original starting point is reached.

6. Without interruption, repeat and perform the exercise of several rounds. Each inhalation & exhalation is as silent as possible. Try to maintain a rhythm without actually counting. Remember that the use of fingers is temporary and ultimately you have to use your will-power to alternate (the nostrils).

Throughout the exercise, your consciousness must be coupled with your breath i.e. your attention will go inside with inhalation and come out with exhalation. It should not leave the breath and wander away.

Perception of Alternate Breathing (Coupled with Retention of the Breath)

In the previous exercise the perception of alternate (nostrils) breathing was performed without pause between inhalation and exhalation, i.e. without holding the breath. This technique can be made more effective by the modification of the rhythm, by introducing retention of the breath between each exhalation and inhalation. The time of holding the breath is to be adjusted according to the ability of the practitioner and in any case it should not produce any discomfort. This modified technique increases the steadiness of mind and awareness.

Exercise

1. Follow the instructions given in the previous exercise upto the first inhalation through the left nostril when the right is closed.

2. At the end of the inhalation, close the left nostril also and retain the breath inside for 4 seconds.

3. Release the right nostril (keeping left one closed and exhale slowly through the right nostril for 6 seconds.

4. At the end of the exhalation, close the right nostril also (so that both are closed) and hold the breath outside for 4 seconds. Then release the right nostril (the same one that was used for exhalation) and inhale for 4 seconds.

5. At the end of the inhalation, close the right nostril (left is also closed) and retain the breath inside for 4 seconds.

6. Finally open the left nostril and exhale through it for 6 seconds. At the end of exhalation hold the breath outside for 4 seconds by closing both the nostrils.

7. Repeat and perform the exercise for several rounds, maintaining the rhythm of inhalation – retention – exhalation – retention – inhalation and so on.

5

Perception of Breathing : Benefits

* **Mental Happiness**
* **Concentration**
* **Operational Efficiency**
* **Alertness**
* **Equanimity**
* **Purity of Perception**
* **Energy Generation**

Mental Happiness

Numerous benefits accrue from the practice of *Prekṣā Dhyāna.* Some benefits pertain to the internal functions and some to the external ones : some are physical and some are mental. One of the immediate benefits is mental happiness. As one becomes more accomplished, mental happiness increases. The feeling is not of joy or pleasure, but of happiness. There is much difference between the two. Wherever there is joy, there is bound

to be sorrow; they are inseparable. What one achieves as a benefit is happiness, and not joy.

Concentration and Operational Efficiency

Perception of breath is an important aid for mental concentration. Besides, it improves circulation, stimulates generation of energy, improves conductivity, and in general, assists the nervous system in its proper functioning. All these collectively result in the control of emotions and passions as well as concentration.

Concentration is an important factor in the daily working and professional field. Our operational efficiency depends on mental concentration. Be he a doctor, advocate, professor or administrator; be he (or she) a managing director of a large concern or a simple housewife engaged in the domestic work, for good results, every one has to concentrate on his (or her) respective work. When one has not learnt to concentrate one's mind on the work-in-hand or concentrate fully on the present moment, one's operational efficiency would be very low – 20% production and 80% losses. But when he learns to concentrate by training his mental equipment to engage only in the work-in-hand, the production will be 80% and losses 20%. The ratio would be reversed.

The exercise of perception of breathing is an easy-to-learn and efficient tool to increase mental concentration and thereby enhance operational efficiency. The practitioner of this exercise trains his mind to concentrate fully on the present activity. Mental concentration means giving total attention to the work-in- hand, i.e. without distraction by memory of the past or planning for the future. Perception of breathing is neither a memory of the past nor an imagination of the future but a reality of the present moment. It is neither imagination nor a mere appearance; it is true and real. And so the exercise of perception of breathing is a tool for concentration on the present moment, of living in the present. *Śvāsa prekṣā* is strictly an event of the present moment – neither of the past nor of the future, because one is aware of the

breath at the same instant as it happens, neither before nor after. This is exactly what is meant by living in the present moment, being fully aware of the present moment. In business and profession, mental concentration means focusing full attention to the work-of-moment, leaving aside all other work for the time-being. To form the habit of focusing full attention is an excellent means of increasing operational efficiency.

Large industrial, commercial and business concerns spend thousands of rupees in training their top managers to increase their operational efficiency. The training institutions, generally, conduct such training programmes through seminars and symposia. But the basic factor for the development of efficiency is mental concentration and this can be achieved by the exercise of perception of breathing.

Alertness

Perception of breath is an unfailing tool for increasing mental alertness. As stated, the technique lays down that one should be fully aware of each and every inhalation as well as exhalation. Obviously this is possible only if the mind is alert and wakeful, otherwise the respiration will be mechanical and not consciously controlled. If we use the analogy of a watchman, a sleepy watchman serves no purpose at all, as when he sleeps, anybody can go in and get out. Regular practice of controlled conscious breathing and its perception increase the alertness of mind. Then, not a single breath can escape its attention, and there will be total awareness. When breath and mind are yoked together, they must travel together, remain together. If one of the two companions goes to sleep, the company would be broken. Granted that normally it is not easy to limit the orbit of the wandering mind. The path of breath is very limited while that of the mind is extensive. Breath travels from the nostril to the lungs – a very small and narrow path. Mind can wander around the world. Indeed it is difficult to couple such divergent partners – a giant with the speed of lightning and a dwarf which moves around at a snail's

speed; but it can be done,. Thus, it is a simple and positive technique for awakening the mind and keeping it alert.

Our purpose is to keep the mind fully awake and alert. The practice of *śvāsa prekṣā* is a powerful means of achieving this purpose. Once the mind has been fully awakened, its restlessness and wanderings vanish and it becomes vigilant and disciplined.

Equanimity

When we are fully aware of the present moment alone, emotional like and dislike disappear. In the absence of memory or imagination, there is neither attachment nor aversion. Freedom from the memory and imagination is also freedom from attachment and aversion.

Awareness of the present moment is thus realization of pure consciousness and perception which is pure and unadulterated, that is uncontaminated by the emotional impurity of like and dislike. That is the moment of present, pure and uncorrupted.

We can see from the above that conscious breathing leads to equanimity. Perception of breath is perception of the present moment which means resting and relaxing the mind by removing mental tension. Regular practice of *śvāsa prekṣā* is a sure remedy for tension.

Purity of Perception

Śvāsa-prekṣā is also an efficient tool for purifying the perception. Pure consciousness is characterised by the faculties of intuition and perception, or rather pure knowledge and pure perception. Our sensory outposts send thousands of messages to our conscious mind every moment. Some of these are perceived, while many others are ignored. The process by which the mind converts raw sensation into perception is complicated. Perception varies by an infinity of factors, and the state of emotions, in particular, has a profound and, at time, decisive effect. Thus when the intensity of emotions is low (or nil), perception will be pure.

But when the emotions are strong, perception is contaminated and coloured. When this happens, mental activity is diverted from perception to conceptual thinking and the mind begins to wander into the labyrinths of logic and inference. *A priori* logic is not accepted as an infallible instrument for realization of truth. Realization of truth needs application of pure consciousness, which is concomitant with pure perceptual cognition. *Śvāsa-prekṣā* is the first step in this direction. Progress in right direction follows till one reaches the goal. *Śvāsa-prekṣā* is the step in the right direction of realization of truth.

In other words, *śvāsa-prekṣā* is the process of pure perceptual cognition, where conception vanishes and perception reigns supreme. The mind cannot be engaged in both conception and perception at the same time. Thus as soon as the concentration of perception begins, conceptual activity recedes and the mind ultimately steadies itself in perception only.

Śvāsa-prekṣā is, therefore, an instrument of developing the basic qualities of consciousness. Normally when we are engaged in perception through our sense-organs, emotional likes and dislikes are concomitant with it. Mental attachment or aversion towards the object of perception follows. For instance, as soon as we smell something, a mental analysis of the smell into good smell or bad smell also occurs followed by likes or dislikes. Pure perceptional cognition is one in which smell is just smell without the element of likes or dislikes attached to it.

In the practice of *śvāsa-prekṣā*, the conscious mind is fully coupled with breath, i.e. there is full awareness of each breath. Awareness of breath does not need any thinking, and in fact, the mind is not engaged in thought but fully engaged in perception of breath. Thus it is a practice of pure perception. Besides, it also develops the concentration of mind.

Energy Generation

When we practise *dīrgha-śvāsa-prekṣā*, our breathing is complete and scientific, which means that we are tapping the

primary sources of bio-energy. Perception of breath might appear insignificant, but it should not be undervalued. It is like pushing the thin end of the wedge to achieve wider benefit. The fact is that we are not tapping a part of the energy-source but the whole of it. As our breathing becomes more and more complete, we produce more vital energy; and its perception leads us to its origin. Activizing this primary source enables us to obtain unlimited energy. Thus *śvāsa-prekṣā* is a very important means of achieving new and higher stages of consciousness.

Samavṛtti-śvāsa-prekṣā is also a valuable instrument of developing energy. Psychologists have discovered that higher levels of consciousness can be achieved by *samavṛtti-śvāsa-prekṣā*. Extra-sensory perception (E.S.P.) such as clairvoyance can be developed by regular practice of *samavṛtti-śvāsa- prekṣā*. Many other parapsychological achievements are possible by its practice.

BOOKS ON MEDITATION

By Acharya Mahaprajna,
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